

## Chapter 5

### November 10: "Hell Jolted Loose"

"You cannot think or imagine anything to equal or compare to the policy the Democrats seem to have adopted to carry this section. I look for a lot of innocent men killed here if things continue as they are now."

*Benjamin Keith to Marion Butler, October 17, 1898, Marion Butler Papers*

The violence of Thursday, November 10, 1898, is multifaceted. Foremost, planned violence to suppress the African American and Republican communities grew into unplanned bloodshed. Anticipating violent reprisals from the black community, white leaders established a framework of preelection preparations that broke down as violence escalated. Previous planning by the Secret Nine and men such as Roger Moore and Walker Taylor appeared to afford more protection of citizens and control of the election rather than to call for an outright offensive strike into the black community. But the frenzy over white supremacy victory, incessantly repeated by orators such as Alfred Moore Waddell and Charles Aycock simply could not be quieted after an overwhelming and somewhat anticlimactic election victory.

The fever pitch of white supremacy rhetoric for the masses reached a breaking point in Wilmington on November 10. Edward Wootten, a student at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, was told by his mother in Wilmington that she feared violence, but "we need it and . . . it must come before things are settled."<sup>1</sup> Her sentiments were echoed by the *Wilmington Messenger* a few days after the riot when the editors stated that "the relations between the races were too strained for it to be avoided" since "matters had reached a point in Wilmington at which a conflict between the races was

inevitable."<sup>2</sup> For the leaders, victory and gratification were theirs with the election win. For the masses, violence overrode sensible thought after the November 9 meeting.<sup>3</sup>

After the previous day's work in securing a meeting of the leading black citizens and assuring their assistance in calming the city, some of Wilmington's Democratic Party leaders felt it unnecessary to attend Thursday morning's 8:00 A.M. meeting to hear the response of the Committee of Colored Citizens (CCC). White attorney George Rountree met one of the leading members of the black community late on the ninth and was reassured that all was well. Rountree was informed that Alex Manly was planning to leave at once and that attorney Armond Scott would deliver an answer to Waddell. Because Rountree and others did not realize that the timely delivery of the response to Waddell was botched, they felt no need to attend the early morning meeting at the armory on the tenth. These behind-the-scenes leaders failed to see that the strict control they had exercised over the Red Shirts and White Government Unions had eroded.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Wilmington Quiet," *Wilmington Messenger*, November 15, 1898.

<sup>3</sup> According to one theory of group aggression, a series of triggering factors are needed to facilitate a riot. The mass meeting of November 9<sup>th</sup> clearly fits the model put forth by psychologist Arnold Goldstein and was a precipitating event that led to the riot the next day. For more information on theories of group aggression, see Appendix H.

<sup>4</sup> McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 693; Rountree, "Memorandum," Henry G. Connor Papers, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

<sup>1</sup> E. Y. Wootten to Edward, November 8, 1898, Wootten Papers, University of North Carolina at Wilmington Library.